

Statement of
Khristine L. Hall
Selectman, Town of New Fairfield

In Support of H.B. No. 6636
An Act Requiring and Invasive Species Stamp for the Operation
Of a Motorboat on the Inland Waters of the State

Before the Committee on Environment
March 1, 2019

My name is Khristine Hall. I am Selectman in New Fairfield. I want to thank you for the opportunity to present my support of H.B. No 6637, an Act Requiring an Invasive Species Stamp for the Operation of a Motorboat on the Inland Waters of the State.

New Fairfield is one of five municipalities (Sherman, New Milford, Brookfield, and Danbury are the others) bordering Candlewood Lake and Squantz Pond and, in fact, has more shoreline than any other municipality. The Town has a park with a beach and over 100 docks on Candlewood Lake. That property is used extensively by residents for swimming, canoeing, kayaking, boating, concerts and other outdoor events, and other recreational opportunities. We have approximately 600 parcels of land owned by New Fairfield resident directly on Candlewood Lake or Squantz Pond. Additionally several hundred live in lakeside communities that have beaches and docks on the lake. Many of these residents who live on the lake have deeded rights to land that extends out into the lake dating back to the formation of Candlewood Lake in the 1930s.

Homes on Candlewood Lake have higher property assessments than other homes. Additionally, we have businesses in New Fairfield that depend for their livelihood on people who visit the lake, including a large commercial marina, boat repair services, sports fishing enterprises, beverage shops, delis and restaurants, and a gas station.

All of which is to say that New Fairfield, both as a town and on behalf of its residents, has a large vested interest in the continuing health and vitality of Candlewood Lake, as well as an interest in protecting the rights of its lakeside residents. If the quality of the Lake were to be degraded, it could have a negative impact on the financial viability of the town as well as on our commercial enterprises.

Candlewood Lake, the largest lake in the state, faces a number of serious challenges. These include:

- Proliferation of Eurasian milfoil that chokes swimming and boating areas
- Increased incidence of cyanobacteria in blue green algae blooms that present health hazards and close beaches
- The threat of zebra mussels that threaten to destroy boat engines, foul beaches, and damage boat ramps and docks
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- Recent discovery of another invasive species – hydrilla – that can drive out all native plants.

The communities around the Lake have taken action to address these threats, spearheaded by the Candlewood Lake Authority (CLA). There are indications that some progress is being made in slowing the advancement of some of these threats. However, with increasing pressure from global climate change and increased usage of the Lake, continued vigilance and pro-active measures to protect the Lake are required.

Because of these threats to Candlewood Lake – and ultimately to the well-being of New Fairfield and other communities surrounding the Lake – I strongly support H.B. No 6637. It has been difficult to find reliable funding to address the invasive species threats. Funding is needed to study the Lake, define and measure the extent of the threat, define solutions, and help fund approaches to minimize the threat.

The owner of the Lake, FirstLight, has provided some assistance, but it is smaller than the need and its quality and availability have not been reliable. Recently, for example, without consulting with their own Technical Committee, as required by FERC, they switched consultants, disrupting the scientific methodology that has long been used to map Eurasian milfoil in the Lake and providing data that is far less comprehensive, thus throwing into question the true extent of weeds in Candlewood. An independent source of funding is required to provide a reliable database and true measurement of the threats. Likewise, assistance in defining and funding solutions would be helpful in making sure that appropriate measures are implemented on a timely basis to address the problems. Led by the Candlewood Lake Authority, we are making good use of sterile grass carp, for example, to help control Eurasian milfoil. But the Lake has to be restocked every two to three years to make sure that progress continues to be made – and the restocking is not inexpensive. Likewise, understanding what our options are for controlling blue-green algae blooms, which are a public health threat, remains an open question.

The proposed mechanism to pay for this funding of requiring boats to have an invasive species sticker is, in my opinion, fair, with in-state boats paying \$5 and out-of-state boats paying \$25. I encourage the Committee to approve this proposal and move it forward.